



American Muslims Observe Ramadan Across the United States

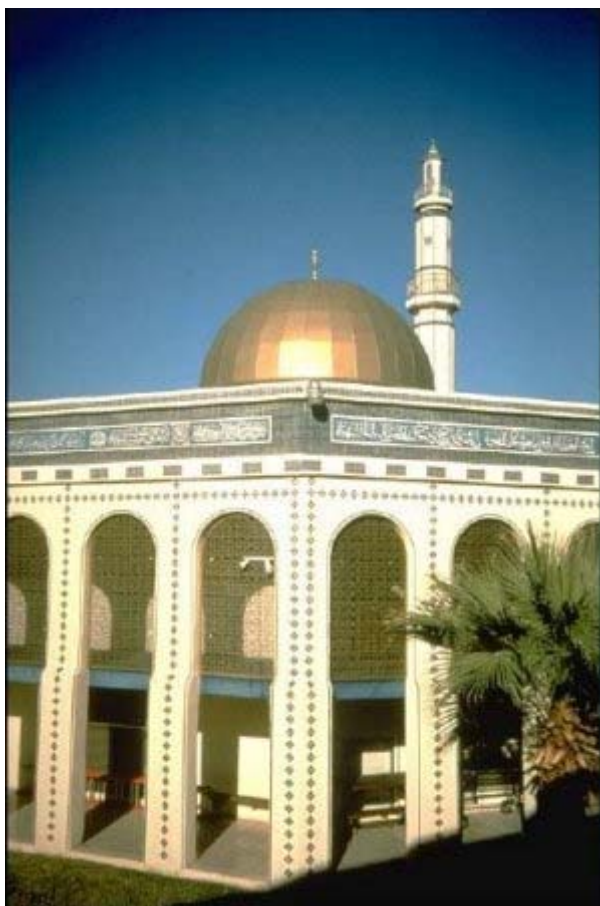
By Steve Holgate
Washington File Special Correspondent

As the autumn sun sinks in the sky they come home from work or from strolls in the neighborhood to gather for the dinner that will begin precisely at sunset. The house is rich with familiar aromas coming from the kitchen, especially that of the thick harira soup with which family and friends will break their daylong fast. As the house fills, the adults greet each other warmly while the children run around excitedly, looking forward to the dinner and the happy gathering, which will last long into the evening. So begins the Iftar, the joyous traditional meal that marks the end of each day of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, prayer and contemplation.

And where are these celebrants gathering this evening? Cairo? Rabat? Tehran? No. This scene is taking place in Beaverton, Oregon, in the northwest of the United States. And it also is taking place in Austin, Texas, as well as in Los Angeles, California, and Boston, Massachusetts.

This may seem surprising in a country in which the great

majority of citizens identify themselves as Christian. Yet Islam has been for some years the fastest growing religion in the United States, with somewhere between a million and 5 million adherents (the number is imprecise because Americans are not required to declare their religious affiliation, even for census records). Many of these Muslims have come from Africa or the Middle East or other parts of Asia, but most are American-born, either the children of other Muslims or recent converts.



With the growing number of Muslims has come a growing awareness in the United States of Islam's customs and observances. Ramadan is a revered time of contemplation and celebration, the month in which Islam commemorates the revelation of the first verses of the Holy Koran to the Prophet Mohamed. Because Ramadan, like other Islamic holy days, is set by the lunar calendar, it shifts a couple of weeks earlier each year. This year, Ramadan began in mid-October and will continue until mid-November.

During this month, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, refraining from food and drink, tobacco and pleasures of the flesh during the daylight hours. All year Muslims look forward to it as a time for gathering with family and friends, a month of affirmation and joy, with readings from the Koran, periods of contemplation and the quiet -- or sometimes not so quiet -- evening celebrations that mark the end of the day's fast and offer the enjoyment of good company and good food.

Whereas Ramadan, like other pillars of the Islamic faith, was practically unknown in the United States even a few years ago, Americans are quickly becoming aware of its place in the calendar and its importance to their Muslim friends and neighbors. Many newspapers now run articles noting the beginning of Ramadan and its conclusion with the Aid al-Fitr, the great feast that ends the holy month. That giant of American journalism, The New York Times, ran an article about Ramadan in the United States -- and included a recipe for harira. Millions of children in public schools learn about Ramadan in the classroom and come to understand its importance to their Muslim classmates.

Virtually all large cities have numerous Ramadan activities listed in local newspapers. Some newspapers even note Christian churches where members are asked to remember their Muslim neighbors during Ramadan and to be mindful of their holy celebrations.

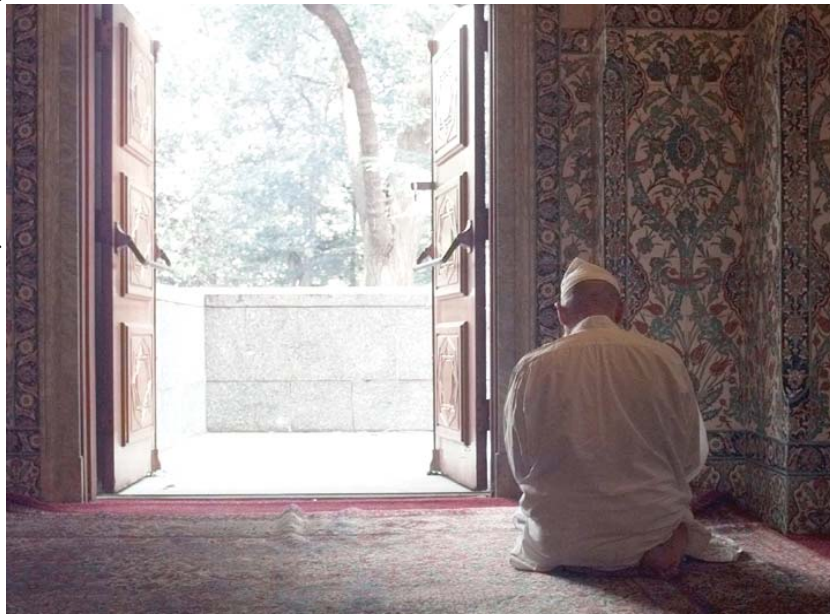
Though the time since 9/11 has sometimes been a difficult one for Muslims in the United States, many public officials have made an effort to reach out to the Islamic community. Municipalities and counties throughout the country, as well as many states have made declarations or passed resolutions observing Ramadan. In the midst of a hard-fought election campaign, both presidential candidates in the United States have released statements

commemorating the beginning of Ramadan.

In his, President Bush said, "American history has taught us to welcome the contributions of men and women of all faiths, for we share the fundamental values of religious freedom, love of freedom and gratitude to God. Americans who practice the Islamic faith enrich our society and help our nation build a better future."

In his statement, Senator John Kerry, the Democratic nominee, said, "American Muslims span nearly every culture and race and we honor and recognize the valuable contributions that Muslim Americans have made to our nation. American society and democracy is stronger when we welcome people of all faiths and traditions."

One of the most interesting stories, though, was not



about a formal event or an official declaration, but the simple commitment of a single public figure. The San Jose Mercury News ran a story about Rob Davis, the chief of police in that California city of almost 1 million inhabitants near San Francisco, and his custom of fasting during Ramadan and passing the Iftar with a local Muslim

family each night of the month. He began doing this several years ago when he was the assistant chief of police and has continued it to the present time. The Mercury News quotes Imam Tahir Anwar, religious director of the local Islamic Society as saying, "You get Muslims to fast; you get nonpracticing Muslims to fast. But then you have the [police] chief of one of the biggest cities in America who just committed to fasting during the month of Ramadan... It's a sign that it came from the heart."

Chief Davis himself simply says, "Everyone needs to know that the chief is the chief for everybody -- not just the majority, not just for those in power."

He adds that Ramadan "helps you focus on what is important in life: your family, the roof over your head, the community you live in, the country that afforded us all of this. ... At the end of the day, we're all the same."

Americans take seriously the Constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion and respect the right of all Americans to worship as they choose. With the increasing awareness of Ramadan and of the growing community of Muslims within the United States, those guarantees and that respect have grown to embrace an important part of an increasingly diverse population.

Fuente:

<http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/Archive/2004/Oct/27-711840.html>



Recursos en Internet

Muslims in America

<http://usinfo.org/usia/usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/muslimlife/homepage.htm>

Islam is considered one of the fastest-growing religions in the United States today. In terms of doctrine and practice, ethnic origins, and ways of adapting to the more general culture of America, it is difficult to overstate the sheer variety of the Muslim experience in the United States.

Exploring Islam's history in the United States

<http://www.usembassyjakarta.org/yusefsalaam.html>

The Muslim Ramadan fast has arrived, and in customary fashion the white media have highlighted the immigrant, Muslim non-Black communities as the models of the Islamic people doing the fast. During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from food and drink from sunup to sundown and vow a period of chastity until the end of the fast. Muslims read the entire Quran and do special prayers at night.

Profile of the U.S. muslim population

http://www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/aris_part_two.htm

The following information is based on the recently completed American Religious Identification Survey, 2001 (ARIS 2001), just released by The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Because of wide national interest in the size and characteristics of the Muslim population, these data are being released in advance of profiles of other religious groups in the United States.

Tailor Muslim practices to fit life in America

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0804/p09s01-coop.html>

The increasing number of native-born Americans who are adopting the faith (constituting about one-third of the total Muslim American population) and Muslim Americans from recent immigrant backgrounds - so many of whom are far removed from their parents' and grandparents' immigrant experiences, with their particular cultural interpretations of Islam - are looking for an Islam that reflects their lives in America.

Faces of American Islam

<http://www.policyreview.org/AUG02/pipes.html>

This essay focuses on just one portion of Western Islam, namely those Muslims who live in the United States and who are either immigrants or their descendants (hereafter referred to as "Muslim immigrants"). It does not deal with the other major component, the converts, nor does it deal with other Western countries.

Chronology of Islam in America

http://www.amperspective.com/html/islam_in_america.html

United Nations report on religious freedom in the U.S.

http://www.religioustolerance.org/un_int02.htm

The fast of Ramadan

http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_rama.htm

"The fast is performed to learn discipline, self-restraint and generosity, while obeying God's commandments. Fasting (along with the declaration of faith, daily prayers, charity, and pilgrimage to Mecca) is one of the 'five pillars' of Islam."

ARTICLES IN MEDIA

Employers must accommodate employees during Ramadan

http://www.shrm.org/hrnews_published/archives/CMS_006280.asp

Transcript: Representatives' Remarks on Islam, Ramadan in the U.S.

<http://japan.usembassy.gov/e/p/tp-se0659.html>

American Muslims Observe Ramadan Across the United States

<http://japan.usembassy.gov/e/p/tp-20041028-19.html>

U.S. House of Representatives Holds Ramadan Iftar

<http://www.masnet.org/masnews.asp?id=669>

The faces and foods of Ramadan

<http://www.post-gazette.com/food/20031123ramadan1123fnp2.asp>

American Muslim Perspectives

http://www.amperspective.com/html/ispu_study.html

